Blue Raiders to open conference season at home

Volleyball set to square off against Arkansas State and UALR this weekend

September 22, 2011 · Athletic Communications

MURFREESBORO, Tenn. - After a hard luck non-conference season, the Middle Tennessee volleyball team will look to get rolling again this weekend when they open Sun Belt play at Alumni Memorial Gym against Arkansas State on Friday and UALR on Sunday. "Obviously we're off to a bit of a rough start," head coach Matt Peck said. "We've played some great matches and lost. We played three matches where we outplayed the opponent statistically and lost. So it's been tough. We're looking forward to getting started with conference season here because it gives us the chance to kind of restart our season." The Blue Raiders, who were picked as co-favorites in the Sun Belt's East Division along with arch-rival Western Kentucky, are entering the weekend at 2-8, having played one of the tougher non-conference slates in the country, which featured three teams ranked in the top 15 nationally. Peck believes that, despite the losses, the level of play has the Blue and White prepared to succeed in Sun Belt play as the team will look to repeat as regular season champions. "I think our pre-conference schedule has put us in great position to do well in the Sun Belt because it was very challenging," Peck said. "Some things that we do that might work against some teams were stopped, and we were forced to try other things. I think we're a better team for it, and hopefully we can get on a nice little roll here." Middle Tennessee will open up play on Friday evening at 7 p.m. against Arkansas State, who is entering the weekend on a five-match winning streak and currently sits atop the Sun Belt's West Division. The Blue Raiders are 11-6 against the Red Wolves, and Peck boasts of a 7-1 mark with the last loss coming in the 2004 season in Jonesboro. "Arkansas State is a very athletic team like we are," Peck said. "They have a very good coach and he knows how to beat teams. We're anxiously looking forward to this test this weekend. They've had some good wins so far this year and have had a couple matches similar to ours. It should be a good match-up." Middle Tennessee is 5-6 all-time in Sun Belt opening matches, but four of those wins have come over the last five seasons. In conference home-openers, the Blue Raiders are a sparkling 5-0 under head coach Matt Peck and 8-1 overall, last losing to Western Kentucky in 2002. On Sunday, the Blue and White will play host to the 5-9 UALR Trojans. Middle Tennessee will be looking to improve their 6-8 mark against the school, and all six wins have come under the direction of Peck. The last Blue

Raider loss to UALR came in five-set fashion in 2003. "Little Rock is kind of a newer team to me," Peck said. "Last year, they didn't really have a setter, and this year they do. I know that they've brought in some new kids and some international kids that we haven't seen. It's nice to have that day off in between, so that we can spend Saturday planning for them." Middle Tennessee posted a pair of 3-0 victories against the schools last season in Arkansas. Ashley Adams was key in both victories, hitting at a .277 rate with 19 kills and seven blocks. This season, the Blue Raiders will more than likely look to Adams again for offense as the junior leads the team with 3.87 kills per set and a .289 attack percentage. Alyssa Wistrick will also look to bring some offense from the outside hitter position as the senior is coming off a career weekend that saw her record 26 kills against Marquette and ninth-ranked Minnesota. "All three of our outsides have had some lingering injury issues, which hasn't helped us this year," Peck said. "After overcoming her knee injury from last year, Alyssa had to get over some back spasms to come back last week, and she had a great weekend for us. She did exceptionally well, and that was huge." Middle Tennessee also boasts of two of the most efficient hitters in the conference. Oyinlola Oladinni leads the Sun Belt with a .370 average, and Lindsay Cheatham isn't far behind at .333. It's been a revolving door at setter this season as Peck has used different players in the role so far this season. However, freshman Kaylee Kehoe was responsible for much of the offense over last weekend, starting both matches, tallying 66 assists and averaging 9.43 per set. "Kaylee brings a lot of energy to the matches," Peck said. "She's going to make some freshman mistakes, and she's a very emotional kind of player. I think that helped our team a lot last week. Morgan Peterson and Angela Peyton also bring different things to the table, so this week it depends on how practice has gone." Defensively, Oladinni leads the efforts at the net, averaging 0.94 blocks per set. Her 343 career block assists rank fourth in school history. Brynne Henderson has also been key to the defense. The senior is well into her second season as the full-time libero and is just 46 digs shy of 1,000 for her career. She's averaging 3.69 per set so far in the 2011 campaign, a career-best. Middle Tennessee will host Arkansas State on Friday night at 7 p.m. before hosting UALR at 1 p.m. on Sunday. Both matches will be played at Alumni Memorial Gym and admission is free.

Printed on December 12, 2013
Original URL: http://www.goblueraiders.com/content.cfm/id/55017